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Difficulty of War under Present Conditions.

The recent occurrence at Tientsin illustrates, better than any words can portray it, a certain change which has taken place in recent years in respect of the recklessness with which nations formerly plunged into war. For two or three days the world was agape expecting the English and the Russian troops to fall to killing each other over the question of a few rods of railroad siding. A generation ago the incident would have resulted in an immediate fight, and ten chances to one in a direful war between the two great powers. Small as the matter of the railroad siding was, it was just the sort of thing which formerly served as the match which kindled the fire of war. For railroad sidings and the like, be it remembered, were never the real cause of war, but only the occasion which let out the pent-up jealousy, hatred and ambition which had been accumulating and biding their time.

There are several reasons for the present reluctance to let loose the dogs of war. They are not of equal force, but all operative. Some of them are of a moral character; others largely selfish in nature.

The cable and telegraph have a conspicuous influence. When the Tientsin incident occurred, the governments at London and St. Petersburg were at

once in communication. They, looking at the matter calmly at a distance, saw the comparative insignificance of the occurrence, and the immense risks and uncertainties involved in a war. An agreement was quickly reached to withdraw the troops of both sides, and let the whole matter be carefully investigated. This was eminently sensible; but without the wires it could not have taken place. Ten days without intercommunication of the governments would have seen the die cast at Tientsin, and the two nations mad with passion and wildly rushing to war. The wires are great war-preventers.

The frightful risks, financial and political, and the uncertainties as to the outcome of hostilities between powers about equally matched, have an immense restraining force. These uncertainties do not arise so much out of the size of the armies and navies as out of the great expensiveness and deadliness of the machinery of war. Since the events of the South African war, the military experts of Europe estimate that with modern weapons one man on the defensive, in the case of frontal attacks, is equal to about ten on the offensive. Between armies of equal strength there could be, therefore, no decisive engagement, as Mr. Bloch has shown. The Boer war, which has cost Great Britain nearly one million dollars per day, has given a clear idea of the frightful expense which a war between England and Russia, for example, would impose.

The men who handle the war-strings know these things, and few of them are so insane as to plunge their countries into what must in all probability be either speedy humiliation or exhaustion and ruin. Every turn of diplomacy is tried, and national backdowns—straight backdowns, though under some other name—such as no important power would have thought of a generation ago, are becoming increasingly frequent. This fear to go to war is not a very high moral reason for abstaining from it; but it shows at least some remnants, or buddings, of sense, and some consideration for the welfare of the nation.

In reference to one another, the great powers have, in fact, become downright cowards. They are almost mortally afraid to fight one another. Each is anxious, possibly, for some other to make an attack upon him, but not one of them dares to lead in opening hostilities. Russia pounces upon Finland or Manchuria, and imposes the hardest possible conditions; she strenuously avoids tackling England! Great Britain crushes mercilessly to death the little South African

republics, but by some backstairs trick of diplomacy she gets herself out of every scrape with Germany, Russia, France or the United States! Our country bravely sends a warship to Venezuela or Morocco, to protect American rights and enforce the payment of claims, and seizes and beats into submission the Philippines; but she waits year after year and does not dare to try to collect a hundred thousand dollars from Turkey! For Turkey has an army of more than half a million of the best trained and equipped soldiers.

Indeed, modern war-machinery has turned all the great powers not only into cowards, but into the cheapest sort of bullies. Japan, possibly, is to be excepted, for she is a novice, and has not yet learned the civilizing virtues of cowardice and bullying. Cowards always try to save their reputation for courage by bullying those smaller and weaker than themselves. These are two of the leading features in the international status to-day. The situation is ridiculous to the last degree, though no government seems to have awakened to the faintest sense of it. Of course this ridiculous condition is preferable to the headlong folly which would set all the great powers to destroying one another, as well as consuming small and weak peoples. The fear of personal ruin which results in cowardice may be the beginning of positive courage in another and much superior direction.

Beyond all these selfish influences which act powerfully to hold the civilized nations back from war with one another, there are unmistakably other higher motives. It is often not easy to detect them among the surrounding rubbish. But they are there. Governments are affected necessarily by the increasing general respect for human life and the growing regard for the rights of others. Life to-day, however selfish and low in many ways, is not all a miserable, merciless scramble for self. Race hatred, bad as it is, is appreciably giving way to race respect in many regions of the earth. Moral self-respect is also increasingly dominant,—the consciousness, that is, that going to war under any ordinary circumstances and committing its ghastly deeds is essentially degrading and dishonorable. Respect for general public opinion is also a real restraint to-day, in spite of easily mentionable exceptions. Every war now has to cover its naked deformity with a thick moral cloak of humanity, in order to secure any general public approval, and even then gets almost none away from home. Such phenomena as the British government having to defend itself before the public at home and abroad for its conduct in South Africa, and our own for its performances in the Philippines, are indicative of the great change that has taken place,—a change which it is impossible for governments not to feel.

All these motives, selfish and altruistic, which act in the modern political world, were operative in the Tientsin railway-siding incident and its management from London and St. Petersburg. Whatever force

one may give to each of them separately in any given case, in combination they make war much more difficult than in the past. Indeed, they make it well nigh impossible between great powers, where combinations against any one of them which is aggressive are now so easily and quickly made. War scares are not half so alarming in our day as they were before the seventies. They rarely materialize, however much the jingo and gutter press and the stock gamblers may do to push them. We are learning to look with increasing distrust on the bulletin-board alarms, and to wait patiently for the real facts and diplomatic transactions to confirm our confidence that war is not likely to be.

However much we may dislike some of the motives that operate, we may at least be thankful that an ever-enlarging area of the earth is being more and more securely closed against the destructive inroads of actual war.

The Nicaragua Canal Treaty.

As was not unexpected, Great Britain has declined to accept the Hay-Pauncefote treaty as amended by the Senate. The response, however, is friendly, and expresses the desire to coöperate in the realization of the canal. The British government finds all of the Senate amendments objectionable. The abrogation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty is considered too far-reaching to be made without some negotiation in which the British side of the case shall be considered. The British view as to the neutralization of the canal is that the governments of the United States and Great Britain can neutralize it only for themselves, and that this action would not be binding on the other powers, whose coöperation is essential to make the neutralization complete. The chief objection, however, is to the so-called Davis amendment, which, though not giving the right to fortify the canal, gave the United States the power to take such measures in regard to it as she might find necessary for the defense of the United States and the maintenance of public order. The British government seems to have felt that this oracular provision might at any time be so interpreted as virtually to destroy the neutralization and also shut England entirely out.

These objections are not unreasonable. The Clayton-Bulwer treaty, which has existed for fifty years as a part of the law of the two nations, has given Great Britain certain well-established rights in regard to the proposed canal, over and above the peculiar interests which she has in it as the greatest of commercial powers. On these interests we can neither afford to trample, nor have we the right to do so. A treaty is the most sacred of all international obligations, and ought to be faithfully kept until it can be abrogated or changed by the mutual agreement of the parties who made it. Falseness to the national word is close to the greatest of national sins.